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ABSTRACT

In an advanced oral communication course, students make five major presentations. One of the foundations of extemporaneous speaking is the ability to outline relevant points and phrases in a coherent, orderly manner. Advanced students must be able to take any topic and dissect it quickly to determine the most succinct way to present it to an audience. The first assignment is an impromptu exercise similar in format to a collegiate individual tournament event; the second assignment is designed to aid research skills. Speeches to entertain are the third assignment, and a symposium is the fourth presentation. The final assignment, where students are paired for mini-debates, combines research, quick thinking, analytical skills, and argumentation. In a basic speech course (averaging about 25 students) at Southern Arkansas University, team testing techniques are used. The process serves to enhance interpersonal interaction, collaborative thinking, and innovative thought. Students are divided into five groups and told that two grades will be given them in the discussions, group and individual. The preparation process is considered as well as the quality of the presentations. Decision-making is democratic, and groups have 2 weeks to collect data and to practice their presentations. Problems sometimes do arise, but students usually make the most of their speaking and research abilities. (NKA)

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Enhancing Extemporaneous Speaking Skills in the Advanced Oral Communication Course and Team Testing Techniques in the Basic Course

Southern States Communication/Central States Communication Association Joint Meetings

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One of the challenges facing a speech educator teaching advanced oral communication is to build upon the abilities gained by students in the basic course. Also to be considered are the writing and speaking talents of each student, as many in an advanced course have taken introductory public speaking from a variety of department faculty. To produce students who can present themselves in a professional, articulate manner involves a number of assignments designed to enhance their extemporaneous speaking skills.

In my advanced oral communication course, five major presentations are performed by students. Before the speaking process begins, however, assignments are given stressing the importance of structure as a communicator. One of the foundations of extemporaneous speaking is the ability to outline relevant points and phrases in a coherent, orderly manner. Advanced students must be able to take any topic and quickly dissect it to determine the most succinct way it can best be presented to an audience.

Once outlining skills have been addressed to my satisfaction, the first speaking assignment takes place. It is an impromptu exercise similar in format to an event offered at collegiate individual events tournaments. Students are asked to write four topics on separate slips of paper and initial them. The topics include: a name of a readily identifiable personality; a famous

quotation; a word (peace, inflation, AIDS, etc.); and some aspect of college life (dorm food, dating, exams, etc.). Following collection of all topics by me, students are selected at random to choose a topic (it cannot be one of their own). Each has two minutes of preparation time to speak for a minimum of six minutes. This assignment is useful as students become used to speaking with few notes.

The second assignment is designed to aid research skills. I hand out a list of 50 topics to students who must choose one and present an eight minute speech for the next class meeting. Students are staggered by class meetings so each is given the same preparation time. Notes must be typed on a maximum of three note cards. Also required are two visual aids and an extensive bibliography.

In order to more effectively use humor as a public speaking tool, speeches to entertain are the third assignment. Videotapes are shown of individuals who have spoken to major groups or conventions in this capacity. Students take a humorous issue and later show elements of seriousness behind it.

Group discussions are used in my basic public speaking course as a way to foster interaction and cohesion in the persuasive speaking process. To a similar degree, a symposium is used as the fourth major presentation in my advanced course. By using this setting to discuss controversial issues of public importance,

students gain experience in situations demanding both formality and first-rate extemporaneous speaking skills.

The final presentation combines research, quick thinking, analytical skills and argumentation. Students are paired up for mini-debates. Topics are chosen by each pair, with each person individually researching the pros and cons. Constructive speeches of eight minutes are delivered by each, followed by cross-examinations and rebuttals. This is an appropriate final assignment as it forces students to think and speak clearly with structure in a highly competitive situation.

While there are many strategies professors can utilize in their advanced oral communication courses, I feel those listed here are significant. Students must realize they are making positive and negative impressions each day by the manner in which they speak. What has been presented are just some of the ways extemporaneous speaking skills can be enhanced in both their personal and professional lives.

Team testing techniques are employed in my Principles of Speech course at Southern Arkansas University. Utilized as an effective instructional method for graded group discussions, the process serves to enhance interpersonal interaction, collaborative thinking and innovative thought.

Group discussions are the third of four major assignments in my basic speech course. They are the next-to-last exercise of the semester, with persuasive speeches being the final presentation. My classes average approximately 25 students, and five groups are selected with five members each. To make the selection process as fair as possible, names of students are pulled out of a hat, with them randomly placed in the five groups.

Team testing techniques begin at this point. Students are told two grades will be allocated to them in the discussions, group and individual. Both encompass the preparatory process, quality and content of their group discussion agendas (outlines) and cohesiveness and effectiveness of the discussions themselves. The discussions are 25 minutes in length, with subject matters dealing with controversial issues of public importance. While subjects are left to the groups themselves for selection, I do reserve the right to veto any ideas which I feel are overused, frivolous or simplistic.

I advocate and encourage the use of democratic decision-making in all group matters. From topic selection to the election of an

impartial moderator, a simple majority vote of each group is needed. This procedure has worked well in the past, as group members tend to select moderators whom they believe are fair, open-minded and willing to criticize those whose individual assignments are not turned in on schedule.

Groups have two weeks to collect data, formulate agendas and practice their discussions. An advantage of practice discussions is that they foster group interaction and cohesiveness. Moderators are encouraged to use cassette tape recorders during these practice sessions, as critically evaluating each performance helps to eliminate repetitive or flawed arguments. Taping also helps to discover if a group member needs to talk more, allowing for a more equal distribution of time among the participants.

A strong sense of cohesion among students almost always occurs in the preparatory process. Group members exchange telephone numbers, allowing for maximum communication between them when questions or issues pertaining to their discussion arise. Many of my students are both commuters and nontraditional, so half of the class periods during this time are used for library research. Videotapes of previous group discussions dating back to 1986 are shown in class, so students can obtain a sense of what their experience will be like.

Even with the best of instruction and individual group preparation, problems arise. How does a moderator deal with an

individual who rarely speaks in practice sessions? How does the absence of a group member hinder preparation? What happens if one person tends to dominate the discussion? Moderators are told their roles will vary depending upon the interpersonal dynamics of each group. They must alternately crack down on lazy participants, make sure each member shows up as scheduled (or I will fail them) and diplomatically tell an overzealous peer to rein in his or her remarks, as others need equal time for an effective wide-ranging discussion.

These ideas detailing team testing techniques could be applied in any situation where group discussions are employed. If used correctly, they can result in students making the most of their speaking and research abilities.